



Living Your Best Life with MS

Program Overview

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Overall Program Objectives

- Increase your knowledge of the principles of positive psychology.
- Identify a challenge you would like to address, along with the positive psychology strategy(ies) you want to employ to develop an action plan
- Participate in an interactive learning experience through sharing and connecting with others
- Increase your confidence in developing a personal approach to addressing challenges
- Identify additional community resources for support and connection

Learning objectives:

- Understand the underlying principles of positive psychology
- Be able to develop personal goals using a goal setting tool of your choice
- Be able to describe the steps required for moving from knowledge to action
- Understand the components of happiness
- Discuss ways to raise happiness levels
- Identify the benefits of social connections and strategies to create them



- Everyday Matters is a program of the National MS Society for those affected by MS - both those living with the disease as well as friends, family and loved ones.
- The program focuses on the principles of positive psychology and how to apply them to life challenges.

Learning objectives, con.:

- Identify strategies to change your mindset and perspective as it relates to happiness
- Become more aware of the mental obstacles holding you back from finding your happiness and how to work through them
- Understand how to create habits to support action
- Describe how the principles of positive psychology are interrelated
- Describe how to spread the principles learned through their networks and communities of support

What is positive psychology?

- Simply put, it is the study of what makes people happy. It is the study of what works, not just what doesn't.

What we know about happiness:

- Happiness is a learned trait
- Happiness is not a mood – but a work ethic
- While happiness is influenced by genetics, people can learn to be happier by developing optimism, gratitude and altruism

Principles of Positive Psychology

- Happiness as a Habit (aka The Happiness Advantage)
- Building Your Community (aka Social Investment)
- Re-training Your Way of Thinking (aka Fulcrum and the Lever, Tetris Effect, and Falling Up)
- Removing the Barriers (The Zorro Circle and The 20-Second Rule)

Goal Setting Techniques

- Personal Goals = Vision for Your Future

Happiness as a Habit, Capitalizing on Positivity

The Happiness Advantage

Key points:

- It is a misconception that success breeds happiness
- Happiness is a choice
- Waiting to be happy limits our potential for success
- There is no single meaning for happiness. Happiness is relative to the person experiencing it; it's based on how we each feel about our own lives.

Strategies to Increase Happiness

- Meditation
- Three gratitudes
- Journaling
- Finding something to look forward to
- Committing conscious acts of kindness
- Infusing positivity into your surroundings
- Exercising
- Spending money- but not on “stuff”
- Exercising a signature strength
- What else is missing?

Building Your Community

Social Investment

Key points:

- A common mistake: at the time when we need one another most, we let go of our most valuable resource: social support
- The most successful people take the exact opposite approach. Instead of turning inward they hold on tighter to their social support
- MS can be isolating. It is important to make sure that doesn't happen
- Research shows connections are core to happiness (for coping, friendship and support)
- Social relationships are the greatest single investment we can make

Retraining Your Way of Thinking

Principles for discussion:

- Adjusting Our Mindset (aka The Fulcrum and the Lever)
- Identifying Patterns of Possibility (aka The Tetris Effect)
- Success Through Resiliency (aka Falling Up)

Identifying Patterns of Possibility, Seeing the Not So Hidden Opportunities

The Tetris Effect

- Our brains easily get stuck in repetitious patterns of viewing the world. So when we are always looking for the negative, we get the negative.
- Think of those “Yes, but...” people you know – they always focus on what won’t work even when presented with positive, viable options.
- We need to retrain our brain to scan for good things.
- Instead of creating a pattern that looks for negatives and blocks success, flip the switch and scan the world for opportunities and ideas that allow success to grow.
- When our brains scan for and focus on the positive, we benefit from three of the most important tools available to us:
 - Happiness
 - Gratitude
 - Optimism

Building Out from a Smaller Circle

The Zorro Circle

Key points:

- Often we are very lofty and grand in making goals – think New Year's resolutions
- The vastness of the goal can be paralyzing, but by chunking out the big, overall goal into smaller, supportive goals, it becomes easier to reach the overall goal
- Feeling more in control is one of the strongest drivers of well-being and performance
- Setting smaller, more manageable goals helps us build our confidence, celebrate our forward progress and keeps us committed to the task at hand.
- Small successes can add up to major achievements; all it takes is drawing that first circle in the sand

The Path of Least Resistance

20-second Rule

Key points:

- Lowering the barrier to change (aka the activation energy) by just 20 seconds is all it takes to begin a new habit
- The more we lower, or even eliminate, the activation energy for our desired actions, the more we enhance our ability to jumpstart positive change
- Limiting the choices we have to make also helps lower the barrier to positive change.
- The less energy it takes to kick start a positive habit, the more likely the habit will stick.
- **It takes 21 days to form a habit, so be patient**

Keeping the Momentum Going

The Ripple Effect

Key points:

- Once we start capitalizing on the principles of positive psychology, the positive changes quickly ripple out
- Practicing the principles in our own lives can become our most effective tool for spreading positivity and ensuring that each person around us is spreading positivity too
- The principles of positive psychology can have positive benefits for family members who are also living with the challenges MS can bring
- Positive emotions are infectious, making them a powerful tool in our interpersonal relations
- The happier everyone is around you, the happier you will become – and vice versa

Resources

National MS Society 1-800-344-4867

- **BOOKS**

- Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment by Martin Seligman, PhD (2003)
- The Happiness Advantage by Shawn Achor (2010)

- **ONLINE**

- www.everydayMSmatters.org
- The Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania
www.ppc.sas.upenn.edu
- Authentic Happiness Resource Projects
www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/resources.aspx
- <http://psychology.about.com/od/branchesofpsycholog1/a/positive-psychology.htm>